



RUSSIA

THE INGUSH-OSSETIAN CONFLICT IN THE PRIGORODNYI REGION

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki
Human Rights Watch
New York • Washington • London • Brussels

Copyright © May 1996 by Human Rights Watch.
All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America.
Library of Congress Catalogue Number: 96-75960
ISBN: 1-56432-165-7

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report is based on a trip to the Republic of Ingushetiya, hereafter Ingushetiya, and the Republic of North Ossetia-Alaniya, hereafter North Ossetia, both states of the Russian Federation, from August 11-19, 1994. Until 1994, North Ossetia was the North Ossetian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), a part of the former Soviet Union. Until 1992, Ingushetiya was part of the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and was also part of the former Soviet Union. Human Rights/Helsinki representatives visited Vladikavkaz, Kartsa, Chermen, Tarskoye, Kurtat, Dachnoye, and Maiskii in North Ossetia and Nazran and Gaziyyurt in Ingushetiya. Jeri Laber and Rachel Denber edited the report, and Shira Robinson provided production assistance for its publication.

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki thanks both North Ossetian and Ingush authorities as well as officials from the Russian Temporary Administration (now the Temporary State Committee) for their cooperation with the mission participants. Human Rights Watch/Helsinki would like to express our appreciation to all those who read the report and commented on it, including Prof. John Collaruso of McMaster University. We would also like to thank the members of the Russian human rights group *Memorial*, who provided generous assistance and advice. In 1994 *Memorial* published an excellent report on the conflict in the Prigorodnyi region, *"Two Years after the War: The Problem of the Forcibly Displaced in the Area of the Ossetian-Ingush Conflict."* Finally, we would like to thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Henry Jackson Fund, the Merck Fund and the Moriah Fund for their support.

Human Rights Watch/Helsinki takes no position on the ultimate status of the Prigorodnyi region. Our sole concern is conformance with international humanitarian law.

I. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On October 31, 1992, armed clashes broke out between Ingush militias and North Ossetian security forces and

paramilitaries supported by Russian Interior Ministry (MVD) and Army troops in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia, a republic of the Russian Federation located in the North Caucasus. The fighting, which lasted six days, had at its root a dispute between ethnic Ingush and Ossetians over the Prigorodnyi region, a sliver of land of about 978 square kilometers over which both sides lay claim. That dispute has not been resolved, nor has the conflict. Both sides have committed human rights violations. Thousands of homes have been wantonly destroyed, most of them Ingush. More than one thousand hostages were taken on both sides, and as of this writing approximately 260 individuals—mostly Ingush—remain unaccounted for, according to the Procuracy of the Russian Federation. Nearly five hundred individuals were killed in the first six days of conflict. Hostage-taking, shootings, and attacks on life and property continue to this day.

While the present report investigates human rights violations committed by all parties to the conflict from 1992 to the present, its major emphasis is on the events between October 31, 1992 and November 31, 1992, on the process of return for the displaced, and on attempts to bring to justice those who committed criminal acts connected with the conflict. The report also examines the Russian government's weak response to events leading to the armed conflict and its utter failure to prevent the destruction of thousands of homes and dwellings.

The fighting was the first armed conflict on Russian territory after the collapse of the Soviet Union. When it ended after the deployment of Russian

troops, most of the estimated 34,500-64,000 Ingush residing in the Prigorodnyi region and North Ossetia as a whole had been forcibly displaced by Ossetian forces, often supported by Russian troops. There are no authoritative figures for the number of Ingush forcibly evicted from the Prigorodnyi region and other parts of North Ossetia, because there were no accurate figures for the total pre-1992 Ingush population of Prigorodnyi and North Ossetia. Ingush often lived there illegally and thus were not counted by a census. Thus the Russian Federal Migration Service counts 46,000 forcibly displaced from North Ossetia, while the Territorial Migration Service of Ingushetiya puts the number at 64,000. According to the 1989 census 32,783 Ingush lived in the North Ossetian ASSR; three years later the passport service of the republic put the number at 34,500. To date, only a small minority of the displaced Ingush have returned to their homes. According to the migration service of North Ossetia, about 9,000 Ossetians were forced to flee the Prigorodnyi region and seek temporary shelter elsewhere; the majority have returned.

BACKGROUND

Originally part of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR, the Prigorodnyi region was given to North Ossetia in 1944 after Stalin's forced deportation of the Ingush and Chechens from the North Caucasus that same year. When the Checheno-Ingush ASSR was reconstituted in 1957, Prigorodnyi was not returned, and North Ossetian authorities discouraged the Ingush from repatriating there. The Ingush consistently maintained their claim to the territory and their right of return; however, a poorly conceived 1991 law passed by the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet allowing for the return and territorial recompensation of Soviet nationality groups repressed and exiled by Stalin simply acted as a catalyst for the conflict. In 1991 and 1992, tensions between Ingush and Ossetians in the region grew quickly, and there were numerous ethnically motivated killings and violent clashes before the ultimate explosion.

The present Ingush-Ossetian emerges from the policies of both Tsarist Russian and Soviet governments, which exploited ethnic differences to further their own ends, namely the perpetuation of central rule and authority. Tsarist policy in the North Caucasus generally favored Ossetians, who inhabited an area astride the strategically important Georgian Military Highway, a key link between Russia proper and her Transcaucasian colonies. In addition, the Ossetians were one of the few friendly peoples in a region that for much of the nineteenth century bitterly resisted Russian rule. Russian authorities also conducted population transfers of native people in the area at will and brought in large numbers of Russian Cossack settlers, thus creating resentment and competing claims for land.

Under the Soviets, local Cossacks were punished for their support of anti-Soviet White forces during the Russian Civil War (1918-1921) and banished from the area, including from the Prigorodnyi region which was given to the Ingush, ostensibly for their support of the Red or Bolshevik forces during the conflict. Soviet administrators often arbitrarily created territorial units in the North Caucasus, thereby enhancing differences by splitting apart like peoples or fostering dependence by uniting different groups. In 1944, Stalin's paranoia led to the forced deportation of the Chechens and the Ingush (among other groups) and the dissolution of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR. The Prigorodnyi region, which had formed part of that unit, was given to North Ossetia, where it remained even after the reconstitution of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR in 1957.

Ossetians were also pawns of central policy. Many ethnic Ossetians living in Georgia and the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast were told to move to areas in the Prigorodnyi region vacated by the Chechens and the Ingush in 1944. Soviet policy from 1960-1990 generally favored Ossetian attempts to control the Prigorodnyi region and prevent Ingush return. In April 1991, the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet passed the "Law on the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples," which promised the Ingush return of the Prigorodnyi region but created no concrete mechanism to carry this out. Before the break-up of the Soviet Union, some Russian politicians, such as Russian President Boris Yeltsin, were favorably inclined toward the Ingush, who were seen as anti-Soviet and anti-center, i.e. against Soviet President Gorbachev and Soviet central authorities.

Lax or biased attempts by Russian authorities to deal with the conflict since its outbreak in 1992 have blocked its resolution. Few of those who committed the crimes mentioned above have been brought to justice. Russian forces deployed once the conflict broke out are implicated in the forced expulsion of the Ingush population from the Prigorodnyi region. In violation of orders to separate Ingush and Ossetian armed groups and stop the fighting, Russian troops either sat idly by while Ossetian paramilitaries and North Ossetian security forces forced out Ingush civilians along with the fighters, or they assisted those efforts with armor or artillery support. In other cases Russian troops did bring Ingush safely out of the conflict zone, but the question arises why those forces did not carry out their orders and stop Ossetian attempts to force out the Ingush, thus obviating the need to bring the Ingush out of harm's way. Once active fighting ended in mid-November 1992 and the majority of Ingush had been expelled from Prigorodnyi, Russian security forces did little to prevent widespread looting and wanton destruction of abandoned homes in the area.

The Temporary Administration-now the Temporary State Committee-had the task of stabilizing the situation and aiding Ingush resettlement, but it made little use of its wide-ranging powers under the emergency rule decree in force in the Prigorodnyi region and surrounding areas between November 2, 1992 and January 31, 1995. As the supreme executive power in the emergency rule area, the Temporary Administration controlled Interior Ministry (MVD) and army troops and had the power to stop disturbances and protect life and property. But it rarely punished criminal behavior by extremists on either side, especially by armed radical North Ossetian groups, and did little to stop demonstrations. Disarmament of militant groups implicated in human rights violations, while a priority of the Temporary Administration, was carried out haphazardly. A Temporary State Committee with diminished powers was founded by a presidential decree in February 1995 after the state of emergency was not renewed. Its main task was to coordinate the activities of federal authorities in the region, but the Temporary State Committee proved as feckless as its predecessor in bringing about Ingush resettlement or achieving stability and security.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our August 1994 research mission to the Prigorodnyi region, Human Rights Watch/Helsinki makes the following recommendations.

To the North Ossetian and Ingush governments:

- | Immediately and unilaterally release all individuals who still may be held as hostages; allow authorities from the Temporary State Committee as well as legitimate Ossetian/Ingush groups to conduct searches for the missing, including searches for possible mass graves;

- | Afford every assistance to Russian federal authorities in their efforts to bring to justice those responsible for crimes committed during and after the conflict, and bring to trial those suspected of involvement in criminal activities connected with the conflict;

- | Discipline law enforcement bodies that carry out their duties in a prejudicial manner, and try those suspected of involvement in crimes;

- | Allow all ethnic groups to reside unhindered on the territories of Ingushetiya and North Ossetia;

- | Conduct a public campaign on ethnic reconciliation.

To the Russian government:

- | Conduct an investigation into the actions of Russian Army and Interior Ministry (MVD) units concerning the looting and destruction of homes in the Prigorodnyi region;

- | Bring to justice those who have committed crimes connected with the conflict;

- | Act decisively to carry out Decree #2131 allowing for partial return of Ingush displaced to their homes in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia, and work towards the return of all displaced to their homes.

To the European Community and the United States government:

- | Investigate possibilities for funding projects in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia that will aid in ethnic reconciliation and the respect for human rights.

II. DEMOGRAPHY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

According to the 1989 census, the last one conducted before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the North Ossetian ASSR had a population of 632,428, of which 334,876 were Ossetian, 189,159 Russian, and 32,783 Ingush.¹ According to that same census, 163,762 Ingush resided in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR out of a total population of approximately 1.3 million. As of January 1, 1994, Ingush officials put the population of Ingushetiya at 249,830.

Although these figures are out-dated, given the numerous conflicts and forced migrations that have plagued the region, they serve as a baseline for lack of any new, comprehensive census.

An indigenous Caucasian mountain people, the Ingush are Sunni Muslims belonging to the western branch of the Vainakh people and are closely related to the Chechens.² The first official division between Chechens and Ingush was made by Russian colonizers during their conquest of the Caucasus in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of the fact that the western clans of the Vainakh (Galgai and Feappi) did not play a large role in

Caucasian War of Sheikh Shamil against the Russians while the eastern ones (the Chechens) did. The Russians were the first to make this distinction.

Ossetians are ethnic Iranian Alans and Sarmatians who originally came to the region from Central Asia in the fourth century. Between the ninth and twelfth century they formed a state-like structure south of the Don river and extending to the North Caucasus. They retreated wholly into the Caucasus area after the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century, mixing with local Caucasian peoples.³ They have generally had a friendly relationship with Russia, joining the Russian empire voluntarily in 1774.⁴ In March 1995, North Ossetia signed an extensive power-sharing agreement with the Russian Federation, similar to one signed earlier with Tatarstan.⁵ Today about eighty percent of Ossetians practice Eastern Orthodox Christianity and twenty percent Sunni Islam.

Ossetians can be divided into three groups: the Iron, who inhabit the area north of the Caucasian mountains; the Tuallag, who moved south of the Caucasian mountains and came under Georgian influence; and the Digors, who were converted to Sunni Islam in the 17th-18th centuries by the Circassians (Kabards). Those Ossetians who inhabit South Ossetia are known in Russian as "Kudartsy" after the "Kudar" ravine where they live, while the Digors are referred to as "Digortsy" after the gorge in which they reside.

III. BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

DEPORTATIONS UNDER STALIN

During the Russian Revolution many Ingush supported the Communist Bolsheviks, while the Cossacks favored the anti-Communist white armies. Sergei Ordzhonikidze, a leading Bolshevik operating in the North Caucasus, allegedly promised the Prigorodnyi region to the Ingush in return for their support. On March 24, 1919, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (b) passed a decree on "Decossackification," which ordered forcible resettlement of Cossacks from the Prigorodnyi region; when the white armies were finally defeated, entire Cossack-populated villages-including those in the Prigorodnyi region-were depopulated, and Ingush moved back in.

In January 1920, the Autonomous Mountain Soviet Socialist Republic, referred to as the "Mountaineers Republic," was formed, with its capital in Vladikavkaz. Initially, the "Mountaineers Republic," included the Kabards, Chechens, Ingush, Ossetians, Karachai, Cherkess, and Balkars, but it quickly began to disintegrate and new territorial units were created.⁶ By July 1924, only the Ossetians and Ingush remained, and that year they were allotted their own autonomous oblasts. In 1924, the Ingush were given their own territorial unit that included the Prigorodnyi region. The right bank of Vladikavkaz served as the Ingush capital, while the North Ossetians had the other side. In 1934, the Ingush were merged territorially with the Chechens; in 1936 this territory was formed into the Checheno-Ingush ASSR with its capital in Grozny. The Prigorodnyi region still remained within the Chechen-Ingush entity.

On Red Army Day, February 23, 1944, all Chechens and Ingush were forcibly deported to Central Asia and the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic (ASSR) was dissolved; its territory, including the Prigorodnyi region, was parceled out among its neighbors. During the first five years of exile, approximately twenty-five percent of deported Chechens and Ingush perished; no one knows how many died in transit.⁷ On June 25, 1946, the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR issued a decree officially abolishing the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Republic (ASSR), charging that,

During the Great Patriotic War, when the people of the USSR were heroically defending the honor and independence of the fatherland...many Chechens...at the instigation of German agents, joined volunteer units... and, together with German troops, engaged in armed struggle against units of the Red Army....⁸

Ostensibly, the deportation was punishment for alleged collaboration with the invading German armies, although the Germans never reached Chechen territory. More likely Stalin ordered the deportation as retaliation for yet another uprising that erupted in the hill country of south-eastern Chechnya in 1940, a time when the Soviet Union and Nazi

Germany were basking in the friendship of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 1939.

INGUSH RETURN TO THE PRIGORODNYI REGION

In late 1956 and early 1957, after heated debate in the highest ranks of the Communist party, some of the nationalities deported *en masse* during World War II were allowed to return to their native areas in newly-restored administrative units.⁹ On November 24, 1956, the Central Committee of the CPSU passed a decree entitled, "On the Restoration of the National Autonomy of the Kalmyk, Karachai, Balkar, Chechen, and Ingush Peoples." Two months later, the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet passed another edict, "On the Restoration of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR as part of the RSFSR."¹⁰ Taken together, the decrees allowed Chechens and Ingush to return over a four-year period, from 1957 to 1960.

For the Ingush, however, this represented only a partial restoration because the Checheno-Ingush ASSR was reconstituted within slightly altered borders that excluded the Prigorodnyi region. Before their deportation from the area in 1944, Ingush comprised roughly ninety percent of the Prigorodnyi population.¹¹ To compensate for the loss of the Prigorodnyi region, Soviet authorities added to the Checheno-Ingush ASSR the Kargalinskii, Shelkovskii, and Naurskii regions from nearby Stavropol Krai.¹² It was little consolation to the Ingush that the new territories were much larger than the Prigorodnyi region as they had wanted the return of Prigorodnyi itself. In 1963, North Ossetian authorities changed the borders of the Prigorodnyi region to reduce the Ingush population and increase the Ossetian: Ossetian-inhabited territory on the left bank of the Terek River was attached to the Prigorodnyi region and certain Ingush-dominated villages were transferred to other districts.

The return of the Ingush and Chechens to the newly reconstructed Checheno-Ingush ASSR and to the Prigorodnyi region was further complicated by the fact that between 1944 and 1957, 77,000 individuals from North Ossetia, South Ossetia, and Dagestan had been settled—some forcibly—in areas previously inhabited by Ingush and Chechens.¹³ Furthermore, Slavs had also settled in the region.

Consequently, Ingush returning to Prigorodnyi were not greeted enthusiastically.¹⁴ There were obstacles to receiving the obligatory residency permit ("propiska"), without which one could not find a home or job in any given town and was subject to administrative sanctions. Land and homes were not returned, and in some cases unpublished decrees from North Ossetian authorities prevented such sales.¹⁵ In 1982, the Council of Ministers of the USSR passed a decree limiting the issuance of residency permits in the Prigorodnyi region and the sale and purchase of homes. While the decree was "ethnically neutral," it overwhelmingly affected the Ingush, since it was they who wanted to return. An Ossetian official admitted that, "In 1982... a decree limited the issuing of *propiski* in the Prigorodnyi region. While the decree was not openly ethnically-based, in fact it was directed against the Ingush, who still sought to come to the area."¹⁶ In 1990, the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet adopted another similar decree limiting Ingush migration to the Prigorodnyi region.

Ingush from Prigorodnyi commonly resent these restrictions. Ruslan Pliyev, an Ingush official, explained,

From 1957 on the Ingush people led a constant struggle to return to their homes and their land. Our return was decided upon, but the leadership of North Ossetia did everything to block this. The home where I and my parents were born was not returned. And if an Ossetian tried to sell an Ingush back his home, his Ossetian neighbors threatened him with vigilantism. And they blocked us with residency permits and with discrimination at work.¹⁷

Ingush from Prigorodnyi also allege job and education discrimination after their return. An Ingush civic leader in Chermen, a village in the Prigorodnyi region, told Human Rights Watch that,

From the very beginning until today they told us, 'Don't forget that you live in Ossetia'....In the factories and enterprises the directors were Ossetians, the specialists were Ossetians, but the workers were Ingush. A year or two before the conflict there wasn't one Ingush director in the whole Prigorodnyi region and only two specialists...[in 1981] the whole oblast level of the party was dissolved and reformed. A new oblast party committee with a certain Odintsov as its head, a Russian, was formed. With his arrival there was progress, things started to get redone. In those rural areas where the Ingush population comprised sixty to seventy percent of the population the Ingush began to get elected as chairmen of the state farms. In Chermen, Tarskoye, Maiskoye, and Kurtat, Ingush became heads of collective farms. But only after the arrival of Odintsov.¹⁸

An Ingush woman interviewed by Human Rights Watch charged that her daughter was not allowed to study in North Ossetia because of her ethnicity. "They didn't hire us in jobs or accept our children in educational institutions. My oldest daughter wanted to be a teacher, she got all fives, but we had to go to Grozny for her to study, no one would accept her in North Ossetia."¹⁹

While bribery was widespread in the former Soviet Union (to gain posts or favors), it seemed to be the only way for Ingush in the Prigorodnyi region to gain any administrative or high level position. One Ingush told Human Rights Watch that,

At enterprises the practice arose whereby an Ingush had to pay a bribe to occupy a middle-level position. And the Ossetians would speak about this, not hiding anything...If an Ingush did buy a position he would be allowed to work for some time unhindered, but then he would be called to the boss who would tell him, "If you don't resign you will have big problems...." This trend was especially strong from 1987 to 1992. They did this to give the impression that they weren't against all Ingush. They would say your position has become redundant. A month later they would reopen this position and hire an Ossetian.²⁰

Most Ossetians generally acknowledge the practice of paying bribes, but claim that in spite of this the Ingush in Prigorodnyi lived as well as or better than the Ossetian population. One Ossetian, for example, told Human Rights Watch that, "The Ingush occupied some good positions, they worked in profitable positions. But they received all this for bribes. They bought these posts. I wouldn't say that the Ingush were in a repressed position."²¹

Relations between Ingush and Ossetians in Vladikavkaz and in the Prigorodnyi region were tense in the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1973, Ingush held demonstrations for four days (January 16-19) on Lenin Square in Grozny, forcing a candidate member of the Politburo, Mikhail S. Solomentsev, to come to Chechnya to address the crowd.²² An Ingush from Prigorodnyi told us that there were meetings in Prigorodnyi itself, which he termed, "the birth of our movement."²³ In October 1981 there were clashes in Prigorodnyi between Ingush and Ossetians, the most serious of which occurred in Vladikavkaz.²⁴ Ingush blame the Ossetians for instigating the trouble and allege that they had support from Moscow authorities.²⁵ Ossetians allege Ingush sparked the conflict and claim that one of them killed an Ossetian taxi driver. Crowds attacked government and police buildings in the North Ossetian capitol and armored cars were deployed and a curfew instituted.²⁶ In January 1982, the North Ossetian first party secretary was replaced by a Russian deemed less biased against Ingush.²⁷

NATIONAL TENSIONS INCREASE UNDER PERESTROIKA

As "perestroika" reached its peak in 1990, events in the North Ossetian ASSR, the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast, and in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR slowly began to spin out of control. Peoples throughout the Soviet Union were rediscovering the "national question," and this region was no exception. Ingush intellectuals began to debate publicly the question of the Prigorodnyi region. Groups such as "Niiskho" (Justice) made the return of Prigorodnyi central to their political platforms, a policy that found general public support.²⁸ A September 1989 conference of Ingush

intellectuals and nationalists decided to reestablish an Ingush territorial unit within the RSFSR which had existed until 1934 when Ingushetiya was merged with Chechnya.²⁹ In 1989 and 1990 60,000 signatures were gathered supporting that demand.³⁰ In March 1990, an article in *Pravda* perceived by the Ingush as denying their claim to the Prigorodnyi region provoked almost a week of demonstrations that reportedly drew 10,000 people. Consequently, the USSR Supreme Soviet created the "Belyakov Commission" to investigate Ingush demands. The commission concluded that Ingush claims to the Prigorodnyi region were not unfounded.³¹

The year 1991 witnessed almost continual demonstrations and counter demonstrations by Ingush and Ossetians. In March 1991, Ingush rallied in the present Ingush capital of Nazran for the restoration of an Ingush state within its pre-1934 borders, and there were reports that Ingush tried to seize Ossetian homes in Prigorodnyi.³² On March 24, 1991, Boris Yeltsin spoke at a rally in Nazran and supported the restoration of an autonomous Ingush republic.³³ The rally sent a USSR People's Deputy, Kh. Fargiyev, to present Ingush claims to the North Ossetian ASSR Supreme Soviet. Fargiyev called for the restoration of Vladikavkaz, the North Ossetian capital, as the Ingush capital; the rescinding of the ban on issuing residency permits for the Prigorodnyi region; an end to the settlement of South Ossetian refugees in the Prigorodnyi region; and the establishment of a commission to pay damages to Ingush who were deported in 1944.³⁴ North Ossetia authorities rejected these demands. Ossetians responded in kind with their own "First Congress" of the Ossetian peoples, held in July 1991. The congress condemned extremist Ingush and rejected any border changes.

On April 19, 1991, at least one person was reported dead and several others were wounded during a clash that broke out between Ingush and North Ossetian police in a village in Prigorodnyi. The next day, the North Ossetian ASSR Supreme Soviet responded by declaring a state of emergency in the Prigorodnyi region and in Vladikavkaz.³⁵ One thousand five hundred Russian Ministry of Interior troops were dispatched to the region, but they stopped neither the rallies nor the violence. On April 28, 1991, three Ingush driving through the Cossack village of Troitskoye were pulled from their car and beaten; in the fight that ensued, eight were killed and twenty-four wounded.³⁶ In June 1991, a "First Congress" of the peoples of the Chechen-Ingush Republic repeated demands concerning Prigorodnyi. In September 1991, in another visit to the area, Yeltsin hinted at support for Ingush claims to Prigorodnyi, but this could have been a move to split the Ingush from the restive Chechens who eventually declared the independence of Chechnya in November 1991.³⁷ In October 1991, the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet and Council of Ministers appealed to the USSR and Russian Federation Presidents, stating that an "extraordinary socio-political situation had developed" and calling on central authorities to intervene.³⁸ In November thousands of Ingush rallied again for the creation of an Ingush republic and expressed anger at the sluggishness in resolving the territorial problem with the North Ossetian ASSR.³⁹

LAW ON THE REHABILITATION OF REPRESSED PEOPLES

On April 26, 1991, the RSFSR Supreme Soviet passed the "Law on the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples," which promised territorial redress for the Ingush as well as other minorities deported by Stalin.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, the law set out no concrete mechanism for its realization; it represented a decent if ill-conceived legislative attempt in the last few months of the Soviet Union to rectify Stalin's crime of nearly a half-century earlier. The drafters of the law would have had to perform a tight-wire act to restore the rights and territories of the repressed peoples without upsetting the status quo or affecting the rights of those presently residing in those areas. Unfortunately, the drafters failed miserably: they provided no means for bringing about a transfer of territory or compensating those who lived on territory to be returned.

Article 3 states only that,

The rehabilitation of the repressed peoples signifies the recognition and realization of their right to the restoration of the territorial integrity of their homeland existing before the anti-constitutional policy of forced recarving of borders, to the

restoration of national-state formations existing before their dissolution....

Rehabilitation of the repressed peoples also entails the return of peoples not having their own national-state formations in accordance with their wishes to their places of traditional residence on the territory of the RSFSR.

In the process of the rehabilitation of the repressed peoples the rights and lawful interests of citizens presently residing on the territory of the repressed peoples should not be infringed upon.^{[41](#)}

Further complicating matters, Article 6 allows for the law's implementation to be postponed, and indeed a moratorium had been in effect until July 1, 1995, on resolving territorial disputes.^{[42](#)} The moratorium had been adopted at the urging of Russia's Security Council, which feared the laws destabilizing effects. When the moratorium expired in 1995, it was extended until 1997.^{[43](#)}

The law's lack of clarity drew criticism from an unpublished Russian government report on the Ingush-Ossetian conflict that was leaked to the press in 1994.^{[44](#)} Vladimir Lozovoi, present head of Moscow's Temporary State Committee in the region, criticized in particular the law's lack of implementation mechanisms. Lozovoi told Human Rights Watch that,

By itself, the law on the territorial rehabilitation of the repressed peoples was humane. And if someone says that this law was not necessary, it just isn't true, that is another extreme. It simply was passed without the corresponding mechanisms for realization. Back then, in 1957, it wasn't complicated to make part of Stavropol Krai part of another republic.... This law was like a time bomb.^{[45](#)}

Pertaining to territory, the President of Russia put a moratorium on all territorial changes. We think it should be extended. Because to decide such issues in the Caucasus is not only impossible but undesirable and dangerous.

The Ingush contend that the law itself is good, but that North Ossetia's militant behavior made it a dead letter in the Prigorodnyi region. Ruslan Pliyev, the head of the presidential administration in Ingushetiya, charged that

The events of October and November 1992 were the armed expulsion of the Ingush population from the territory of North Ossetia. [These events] by their very nature were a carefully planned act by the leadership of North Ossetia to prevent the implementation of the Law on the Rehabilitation of the Repressed Peoples.... The National Ingush Council (Narodnyi Sovet Ingushetii) did an awful lot so that the law on rehabilitation would be passed. It constantly worked in Moscow, it had a lot of contacts.

As soon as the law about rehabilitation was published in 1991, in North Ossetia, it was "bayonnetted." There was a negative propaganda campaign on all levels against the law.... The North Ossetian leadership presented everything that went on here [in support of the law] as though the Ingush were preparing aggression. As though a danger hung over North Ossetia. All this was done to justify the deployment of armed formations, the OMON, the National Guard, and armed self-defense units. And parallel with this, military hardware was purchased.^{[46](#)}

For their part, the Ossetians fear that the law was aimed at stripping Prigorodnyi away from their republic and was directly responsible for the outbreak of the conflict. As one official remarked,

Many things point to the fact that if there had not been this political preparation.... these events would hardly have occurred on such a scale and with such consequences. I mean the scale of military operations and the death of so many people. But why do we think this way. We, for example, see the reason. It's the passing of the law on the rehabilitation

of repressed peoples of April 26, 1991.^{[47](#)}

A top Ossetian official in Chermen, where Ossetians suffered more than in any other village in Prigorodnyi, also blamed the armed conflict on the law: "All this was provoked by the law on the rehabilitation of the repressed peoples. It wasn't worked out down to the details and everyone could interpret it as he wished. After this law [was passed], people started to hold demonstrations. They said that Russia had given land, but that the Ossetians refused to give it up. The Ingush had their 'informal' organizations."^{[48](#)}

Although the Ingush generally insist that it was the non-implementation of the law that created the problem, some admit that certain "hot heads" stirred passions. One official in Nazran, the Ingush capital, told Human Rights Watch that,

[After the law was adopted], the further chain of events was as such: Several different hotheads demanded the quickest realization of the law, there were all different types of demands, and in Prigorodnyi they were sometimes very provocative. In several cases we're sure that there were calls made by provocateurs, especially sent there.^{[49](#)}

BREAKAWAY OF CHECHNYA AND THE CREATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF INGUSHETIYA

In November 1991, seven months after the adoption of the Law on the Repressed Peoples, the Checheno-Ingush ASSR unilaterally declared independence from Russia as the Republic of Chechnya-Ichkeriya. The three Ingush-inhabited regions of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR decided not to join Chechnya in its independence drive precisely for fear that this would jeopardize its chance to reclaim the Prigorodnyi region.^{[50](#)} On June 4, 1992, the Russian Supreme Soviet founded the Republic of Ingushetiya within the Russian Federation, but without defined borders. The Ingush believed that the ultimate borders of the new republic would still include the disputed territory of Prigorodnyi, as provided for in the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples.^{[51](#)} At the same time Ossetian officials, concerned that the newly-formed republic would seek to include the Prigorodnyi district, successfully lobbied for a five-year moratorium on the law's implementation; then vice-chairman of the North Ossetian ASSR Supreme Soviet, Yuri Biragov, commented that, "Ossetia is pleased by any law that does not envision redrawing her border."^{[52](#)}

Since all the central structures that exercised power and authority over the three Ingush regions of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR remained in Grozny, the capital of the newly formed Chechen Republic, the traditionally under-developed Ingush territories were left utterly leaderless. One Ingush from Chermen told us that,

For a year and a half Ingushetiya remained without any authorities; Chechnya broke away...A demonstration could remove any chairman, any council. During this time almost every day [Ingush sent] telegrams to the Russian Supreme Soviet and to the President himself requesting them to stop this. National movements were rather strong at this time. [But our telegrams] had absolutely no effect....The Russian authorities for eighteen months left Ingushetiya without any functioning authority. Regional soviets and other structures worked in name only.^{[53](#)}

Vladimir Lozovoi, head of the former Temporary Administration and presently chair of its successor, the Temporary State Committee, seconded this opinion:

The Ingush Republic was formed inside the borders of three administrative regions of the former Checheno-Ingush ASSR. But to this day the borders of that republic [Ingushetiya] are not defined. And that is what exploded. Imagine, on the one hand, the law on the repressed people was not realized, and on the other hand, a new republic [Ingushetiya] was formed spontaneously. And when all this combined together, there were provocateurs who pushed people to bring the law into effect through force.^{[54](#)}

This lack of authority proved disastrous once armed conflict broke out in October 1992. One Ingush reflected,

All national movements were sick with this [Ingush-Ossetian] conflict. And the Ingush national movement is no exception. And when the conflict started, part of the leadership simply stepped aside and let the masses take their course. There and then, when it was necessary to say this is not right, this is wrong, they didn't have the authority, the boldness. And the mass became uncontrollable."

THE ROLE OF SOUTH OSSETIANS IN THE CONFLICT

As a result of a war in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast (A.O.), which is part of Georgia, thousands of South Ossetian refugees were forced out of their homes in both the South Ossetian A.O. and in Georgia proper and fled to North Ossetia. There some of them played a significant role in both the tension that led to the fighting, in the fighting itself, and in the destruction that followed. These ethnic Ossetian refugees-many of whom settled in the Prigorodnyi region-created new economic and demographic problems for an already creaking social infrastructure in the North Ossetian ASSR and competed with Ingush for jobs.⁵⁵ As of mid-1994, 43,168 Ossetian refugees lived in North Ossetia, most from Georgia. Of these, 16,000 lived in Prigorodnyi.⁵⁶ South Ossetian militias played a significant role in the wanton destruction of Ingush homes after open hostilities ended on November 5, 1992.

Between 1989 and 1992, fighting flared in the South Ossetian A.O. and in Georgia between ethnic Ossetian paramilitary troops and Georgian Interior Ministry (MVD) units and paramilitaries.⁵⁷ South Ossetia had demanded to secede, and Georgia cracked down on the renegade area by sending in troops. Approximately 100,000 ethnic Ossetians fled Georgia and South Ossetia, and another 23,000 Georgians headed in the other direction. One hundred villages were reportedly destroyed in South Ossetia. Also the North Ossetia-Georgian border went largely uncontrolled, providing an almost unhindered access point for weapons, fighters, and ammunition. in both directions.⁵⁸

North Ossetians and others with whom we spoke stated that the South Ossetian refugees found it difficult to adapt to conditions in North Ossetia in part because of their traumatic deportation and their more traditional culture. A Russian journalist in June 1992, four months before the outbreak of the conflict, commented that,

Considering the psychological trauma connected with the effort to survive of Ossetians from Tskhinvali, [the capital of the South Ossetian A.O.] the situation is tense in the extreme. Large numbers of refugees...are in a state of despair. They can blow up at any cause.⁵⁹

In addition, it quickly became apparent that the South Ossetian refugees would not be short-term refugees. A Russian sociologist who lives and works in Vladikavkaz told us that,

There were so many refugees from South Ossetia that there were even problems between local Ossetians and those who had come, because many of them...are marginal. They are more Georgian by their way of life, mentality, by everything. Our government had the idea that all the refugees (from South Ossetia) would one day return. And when we did an opinion poll, we [learned] that the majority of people who remained here are from internal regions of Georgia....They experienced [there] some physical threat or violence. And no one or nothing can force them to return there. They live here in dormitories in the worst of conditions, but they have accepted life in those conditions rather than return. They believe there still is a risk for them.⁶⁰

Tensions grew between South Ossetian refugees and the roughly 15,000 ethnic Georgian citizens of North Ossetia. A deputy to the North Ossetian Supreme Soviet explained,

When the war began in South Ossetia [Georgia], there were thousands of refugees....Naturally, those Ossetian refugees

from South Ossetia and from Georgia who fled here wanted to kick out Georgians living here. There are 15,000 Georgians living here, just in Vladikavkaz...We stopped this, no one fled.[61](#)

Ossetians, however, generally agree that the South Ossetians must be accommodated and given the same treatment as Ingush displaced from Prigorodnyi.[62](#)

South Ossetian leaders openly boast about their role in the fighting, and South Ossetian paramilitaries, militia, and some South Ossetian refugees are implicated in much of the wanton destruction and violence committed during and after the outbreak of hostilities in 1992. The deputy chairman of the South Ossetian Supreme Soviet, Alan Chochiyev, commented that, "In the course of the military conflict in the Prigorodnyi region the Ossetian people for the first time came out as one....the events in the Prigorodnyi region were, for the first time in recent history, a military-national appearance of the Ossetians."[63](#) Oleg Teziyev, commander of the notorious South Ossetian Battalion, angrily rejected the North Ossetian government's limited attempts at reconciliation with the Ingush:

I accept the laws of those who fight. You can argue if they are "dirty" or they are "clean," but those are the rules. Either I accept [them], or I reject them and become a refugee... Imagine: the south [Ossetia] is destroyed, Prigorodnyi is lost....I don't understand how one can vote for a leader who calls for war with the Ingush, and now wants his people to live peacefully with them. [Imagine:] a leader, who with all his power cursed Adeamon Nykhas, Chochiyev, and me, and then terrified andpale called Tskhinvali [the South Ossetian capital] and asked for help.[64](#)

In some cases North Ossetians tried to protect Ingush, while South Ossetians attacked them. While a North Ossetian neighbor hid and helped an Ingush family interviewed by Human Rights Watch, South Ossetian refugees looted their home, and a policeman originally from South Ossetia torched the remains.[65](#)

Another Ingush man who was held hostage complained that, "The 'Kudartsy' [South Ossetians] were the worst. When they exchanged us, 'Irontsy' [North Ossetians] came to escort us. It was easier with them, they didn't swear at us or insult us."[66](#)

An Ossetian intellectual explained-but did not justify-the behavior of South Ossetians by pointing to their own humiliation and degradation at the hands of Georgians during the Georgian-Ossetian conflict in 1992:

The South Ossetians played a large role in forcing out the Ingush. They are often accused in the press of having exhibited a certain violence and cruelty (*zhestokost*). The war was very cruel. But what was the situation then of the South Ossetians? They were ripped apart by the Georgians, Tskhinvali was surrounded, it was fired upon at point-blank range. It's not only the war. They were morally degraded. Of course they were very angry.[67](#)

In August 1995, an Ingush official charged that over seven hundred residences in the Prigorodnyi region that had belonged to Ingush had been seized by South Ossetians.[68](#)

THE ARMING OF OSSETIANS AND INGUSH

During the three years preceding the outbreak of conflict in October 1992, both the Ingush and the Ossetians armed at a furious pace. Much of the North Ossetian ASSR's acquisition of weapons was connected with the war in South Ossetia. Weapons flowed into Ingushetiya freely from Chechnya, and until the outbreak of the conflict one could purchase automatic weapons freely at the market in Nazran. Ingush groups of twenty or thirty to two hundred fighters armed with automatic rifles, light machine guns, and rocket-propelled grenades operated in many of the Ingush villages in Prigorodnyi.[69](#) An Ingush man from Kurtat complained to Human Rights Watch that the Ingush had only light weapons while the Ossetians had heavy weapons such as APCs and artillery.[70](#)

In 1991, the North Ossetian ASSR Supreme Soviet adopted several decrees incorporating paramilitary groups into North Ossetian security forces. Many of these units had armored personnel carriers and heavy machine guns. One source puts the number of these forces at five thousand.⁷¹ A Russian government report on the conflict describes these decrees in great detail.⁷² While the laws and decrees contradicted both North Ossetian law and Russian Federation laws, central authorities did little to stop the process. On November 15, 1991, the Supreme Soviet of North Ossetian ASSR passed the "Law about Supplementing the Constitution of the North Ossetian ASSR," which provided for the creation of self-defense forces for the republic as well as of a so-called republican guard. On May 21, 1992, a special session of the North Ossetian ASSR Supreme Soviet adopted a decree that ordered the republic's self-defense committee to produce weapons at enterprises within Vladikavkaz. An attack on South Ossetian refugees by Georgian gunmen in South Ossetia supposedly elicited this measure. In June 1992 the procuracy of North Ossetia raised legal objections to these decrees, but the protest was ignored. Moreover, on October 20, 1992, the "Law On Security" came into force in North Ossetia, allowing for security forces to include local popular self-defense units and the republican guard.

Weapons for a peace-keeping battalion in South Ossetia and for USSR Interior Ministry (MVD) units serving in South Ossetia found their way into private hands. Also, in the fall of 1991, twenty-one BRDM-2, a light armored personnel carrier, were acquired by the directorate of the Prigorodnyi region collective farms. Such armored personnel carriers became commonly known as "collective farm APCs."⁷³ Although the cannons and machine guns had been removed from them, an examination after the fighting indicated that they had been used in battle.⁷⁴ Also, on the eve of the conflict, twenty-four BTR-80 APCs were delivered to the North Ossetian Interior Ministry. Once the conflict broke out, Russian authorities disbursed weapons to North Ossetian authorities, which then found their way into the hands of both militias and North Ossetian Interior Ministry (MVD) units.

IV. 1992: TENSIONS AT A BOIL

Throughout 1992, tension, crime and ethnically-motivated attacks grew between Ingush and Ossetians in the Prigorodnyi region. A leaked Russian report noted the ethnic nature of crimes and attacks in the Prigorodnyi region:

The criminal situation in the republic-almost all of which had an ethnic angle-deteriorated in the nine months preceding the conflict in Vladikavkaz and in the Prigorodnyi region. Efforts to investigate these crimes were haphazard and ineffective. During this period there were thirty one premeditated murders, thirteen serious assaults, 120 bandit attacks, and 135 robberies, of which sixteen murders, one hundred bandit attacks, and sixty-nine robberies went unsolved.⁷⁵

Ossetians and Ingush interviewed by Human Rights Watch confirmed that relations between the two had steadily deteriorated throughout 1991 and 1992. An Ossetian official in Chermen, for example, ticked off alleged crimes by Ingush against Ossetians: "Tensions existed already for quite some time. Two years before the conflict broke out, at least. Armed men appeared on the kolkhoz [collective farm] field and would steal equipment. Our taxi drivers were killed there. By 1991 Ossetians stopped going to Ingush villages. It already was unsafe. On eight different occasions Ingush stole equipment from the state farm in Chermen." Another Ossetian in Chermen commented on the mutual mistrust between Ossetians and Ingush: "[Before the conflict] they were together all the time at work; they would close the door and speak in Ingush, insulting [us]. We work together, different nationalities, you should speak in Russian, the lingua franca. But they spoke in Ingush."⁷⁶ A retired Ossetian woman from Kurtat remembers that relations in the village between the Ingush and the Ossetians deteriorated before the conflict broke out, with Ingush insulting the Ossetians by calling them "Beria's Whores."⁷⁷ In July 1992, the North Ossetian deputy interior minister stated that 290 police were guarding farm workers in the Prigorodnyi region from conflict with Ingush.⁷⁸

Ingush tell similar stories of mistrust and recriminations. Lyuba, a fifty-five-year-old Ingush woman who lived in Dachnoye, commented that, "You know before this started we were always threatened-they told us that we had

occupied their land. At work the Ossetians would harass us and when they drank on the job they would shout, 'Get out, Prigorodnyi Raion [region] is ours!'⁷⁹ According to Ibragim Kosboyev, a member of the Russian parliament from Ingushetiya,

If one wants to discuss the prelude to the conflict, you just have to remember that in the eighteen months [before the conflict broke out], while there was a state of emergency, twenty-five Ingush were killed by people in uniform-Ossetian guardsmen and OMON members. No one was punished....⁸⁰

By October 1992, the situation in the Prigorodnyi region had reached its peak. All sides were heavily armed. There was no central authority in Ingushetiya, but rather a hodge-podge of regional councils. North Ossetia, flooded with ethnic Ossetian refugees from Georgia, perceived itself under threat from the east [Ingushetiya] and the south [Georgia]. Furthermore, North Ossetian security agencies in Prigorodnyi did not act as impartial guardians of public order but as another partisan militia. An Ingush we interviewed in October 1992 remembers a general unease, a feeling that a conflict was growing with the Ossetians. He relates that, "Several times, I don't remember the exact date, several Ingush guys were killed [by Ossetians] and an Ingush girl was crushed by an APC. You could feel that a conflict was close, but no one wanted this. But the authorities didn't take any steps." He said that all sides had weapons, including automatic rifles, but that the Ossetians had heavy weapons such as APCs and artillery and were organized in self-defense, guard, and OMON units.⁸¹ By the last week of October, sporadic shoot-outs and clashes between Ossetian police and Ingush militants erupted. This resulted in the Ingush construction of barricades

around their neighborhoods and villages. North Ossetian authorities demanded the removal of these barricades and the disarmament of all Ingush.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE EVENTS IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING THE ARMED CONFLICT

The following is a rough chronology of the events of October 21-30, 1992, preceding the eruption of open hostilities on October 30, 1992.

October 21-22, 1992

| Clashes broke out in the village of Yuzhny, leading to six deaths, including two Ossetian policemen. The police had gone to the village to investigate an incident, and a clash broke out with local residents.⁸² Ingush allege that a total of six Ingush were killed in the Prigorodnyi region between October 20-22, including an eleven-year-old girl crushed by an Ossetian armored personnel carrier.⁸³

October 24-26, 1992

| On October 24, 1992, a session of the Nazran, Malgobek, and Sunzha regional councils and Ingush deputies from the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia was held. This body decided to organize self-defense units that would patrol all areas in the Prigorodnyi region where Ingush resided. The decision stated that,

....the position of the Ingush in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia continues to worsen, and in the past years has become dangerous for human life....Such a situation is possible given the fact that repressing, insulting, and destroying the Ingush has become state policy of the leadership and parliament of North Ossetia....The government of Russia has not taken the necessary measures to realize laws reinstating the constitutional rights of the Ingush people to their state and territorial unity....[It is decided] to unite volunteers in self-defense units and organize their patrols [*dezhurstvo*] in all population centers in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia where Ingush live. The service of [self-defense] units

will exist until land taken away by the Stalinist regime is returned to the jurisdiction of the Ingush Republic...in order to ensure the security of the volunteers and of Ingush living in the Prigorodnyi region, [the decree] allows the use of personnel and other weapons, state transport and other technical services....[84](#)

| Over the next several days Ingush residents of the Prigorodnyi region set up barricades blocking the entrance to their villages.

| The Supreme Soviet of the North Ossetian ASSR ordered the removal of all barricades from villages and the disarming of all Ingush. If this were not done, the North Ossetian ASSR government would begin combat operations with the participation of the republican guard and popular militias.

| On October 26, 1992, the Presidium of the Russian Supreme Soviet ordered the creation of a mixed commission to deal with the mutual Ingush-Ossetian problems.[85](#)

October 28, 1992

| Ingush allege that two Ingush brothers were killed by an Ossetian armored personnel carrier; in response, the Ingush rebuilt barricades to their villages and armed themselves.[86](#)

October 30, 1992

| Fighting breaks out in the evening in the villages of Kurtat, Dachnoye, Oktyabr'skoye, and Kambilevskoye between Ingush and Ossetian armed groups.[87](#)

October 31, 1992

| Armed Ingush from Ingushetiya enter the village of Chermen and attack the police station. The Ingush also disarm a unit of Russian Interior Ministry (MVD) troops there and seize several armored personnel carriers.[88](#)

VI. 1992-1994: VIOLATIONS OF THE RULES OF WAR IN THE INGUSH-OSSETIAN CONFLICT

The conflict in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia can be divided into two stages: October 31-November 5, 1992; and November 6, 1992 through the present. The overwhelming majority of violations occurred during the first period, as the result of armed clashes between Ingush militias on one side and North Ossetian Interior Ministry troops, North Ossetian paramilitaries, and South Ossetian armed groups on the other. Russian Interior Ministry Troops and army units sent to the region ostensibly to restore order helped North Ossetian forces defeat the Ingush armed groups, often leading assaults. As a consequence, the vast majority of Ingush living in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia, between 34,500 and 64,000 people, were forcibly displaced. Some 9,045 Ossetians fled their homes also, but by mid-1994 about two-thirds had returned.[89](#)

During the first period of the conflict, North Ossetian Interior Ministry troops and paramilitaries, South Ossetian armed groups, and Ingush militants took hostages, committed murder, looted, wantonly destroyed civilian property, and used indiscriminate fire. All sides also committed these same abuses, albeit to a much lesser degree, during the second stage of the conflict. Russian forces often stood by and allowed these events to occur, and in some cases took an active part in some, such as looting. There were also reports that Russian forces used indiscriminate fire against civilian areas in actions against Ingush militias.

During the second period, a majority of Ingush homes in the Prigorodnyi region were looted by North Ossetian paramilitaries and South Ossetian armed groups again with-at the very least-the acquiescence of North Ossetian and Russian security authorities. Most of this destruction occurred in the second two weeks of November 1992 and early December in spite of the fact that a state of emergency had been proclaimed in November 2, 1992, and the Prigorodnyi region was largely under the control of Russian and North Ossetian forces by November 5, 1992, after the Ingush had fled or been expelled. The state of emergency was annulled in February 1995. As a result of the conflict, a total of 2,728 Ingush and 848 Ossetian homes as well as numerous schools, shops, restaurants, and various parts of the infrastructure were destroyed.⁹⁰ Half of the destroyed Ossetian homes have been fully repaired.

According to the Russian Federation Procuracy, between October 31 and November 5, 1992, 583 were killed (350 Ingush/192 Ossetians), 939 individuals were wounded (457 Ingush/379 Ossetians), 261 were reported missing (208 Ingush/37 Ossetians), and 1093 were taken hostage (708 Ingush/289 Ossetians).⁹¹

Hostage-taking began almost immediately after open hostilities commenced and exchanges began almost immediately after the fighting stopped. Hostage-taking has continued to a much lesser degree to the present. On November 9, 1992, ninety people, among them sixty men, were sent to Ingushetiya from North Ossetia. Usually women and children were the first to be exchanged since most men were suspected of having taken part in the conflict, though security officials had insufficient physical evidence to prove this. In the first full week after the conflict ended on November 5, 1992, most of the hostages were exchanged, according to figures from the former Temporary Administration. At that time it was believed that 310 Ingush and 180 Ossetians were still being held hostage. An additional seven Russian military personnel were believed imprisoned by the Ingush.⁹² At present there are still 196 Ingush and thirty-seven Ossetians reportedly missing.⁹³

DACHNOYE

Violations by Ossetian Forces

Lyuba, a fifty-five-year-old Ingush woman, lived in Dachnoye, a predominantly-Ingush village about five kilometers northeast of Vladikavkaz. Of the 418 homes in Dachnoye, 390 belonged to Ingush and eleven to Ossetians; all but two were fully destroyed. The last time Lyuba saw her husband, Musa Magomedovich Kh., was on November 2, 1992, when she and others fled the village. She has not heard of or from her husband since that time. Her home was looted and burned. According to Lyuba,

The firing started on Saturday, October 31, from the direction of Vladikavkaz. All night it continued, increasing in force by the next morning. The Ossetians were moving to surround the village, their APCs were already visible. My husband told me, "It's time for you to go."⁹⁴

Her husband stayed at home because, according to Lyuba, the family had cattle, and they were afraid they would lose them if everyone left. She heard reports that he was taken hostage on November 4, 1992 but has heard nothing since.

CHERMEN

A farming village, Chermen lies about ten kilometers north of Vladikavkaz on the road to Nazran, the Ingush capital. It is another four or five kilometers to the Ingush border. Chermen's 7,500 inhabitants were divided almost equally between Ingush and Ossetians, with the former slightly predominating. Ingush lived at the south and north ends of the village, with Ossetians residing in the center. Since the conflict ended, some Ingush have moved back to the northern neighborhood. In the southern end of the village, however, Ingush homes remain empty and ruined because people are afraid to move back. Of Chermen's 1,412 homes, 445 Ingush homes were partially or fully destroyed as were 202

Ossetian dwellings.⁹⁵

Ossetians suffered more in Chermen than in any other place where fighting broke out in October 1992. While few Ossetian homes were destroyed in a majority of the villages of the Prigorodnyi region, in Chermen a third of all Ossetian homes were either fully or partially destroyed. In addition, many were killed by Ingush fighters or taken hostage during the 1992 fighting.

According to most accounts, armed Ingush militants attacked the militia post in Chermen early on the morning of October 31, 1992, and killed the police inside. At some point that morning Ingush fighters disarmed several Russian soldiers and seized their armored personnel carriers.⁹⁶ There were reports that Ingush fighters arrived on Kamaz trucks--large, heavy-duty commercial Soviet vehicles--that specifically had been fitted with armor plating. Ingush fighters held the village or parts of it until November 4, 1992, during which time they looted and destroyed homes, took hostages, and reportedly summarily executed at least two individuals. On or around November 4, 1992, units of the Russian army--with Ossetian Interior Ministry (MVD) troops and paramilitaries in their wake--retook the village. After the village was recaptured, Ingush were killed, taken hostage, abused, and their homes were looted and destroyed. While Russian forces did not take hostages--though their indiscriminate fire may have killed civilians--they did little or nothing to stop the actions of the Ossetian forces. Half of all Ingush homes in the village were destroyed, and the southern half of the settlement, where Ingush predominated before the conflict, stands empty, looted and destroyed.

Violations by Ingush Forces

Human Rights Watch spoke with Kazbek, a fifty-five-year-old Ossetian who lives in Chermen and had worked as a cook at the village cafe. During the conflict, his parents were taken hostage and his home looted and destroyed. At 8:00 A.M. on October 31, 1992, he headed out to dig potatoes in the collective farm fields; before he reached there, however, his son caught up with him and announced, "A war has started." He remembers on that day that,

We could see armed Ingush on Kamaz trucks that had been fitted with armor. They were coming from the direction of Nazran...At about noon we started to evacuate people to Olginskoye.⁹⁷ As we were going there people were shooting at us. The next day my parents were taken hostage, Tugan Kh. and Vera Kh. My mother is seventy, my father died last year. My mother was exchanged after two days of captivity, my father, after eight.⁹⁸

Around November 8, 1992 (after Russian forces secured the village), he returned to his home, which had been destroyed and looted. According to Kazbek:

My house was destroyed on November 2 or 3, 1992. Those who stayed told me that Ingush were in my home three or four hours [looting], they took all that was good and then torched the place...they did that to about every third house.... [Those who stayed] told me that groups went down the street, and local Ingush pointed out where an Ossetian lived. The looters, however, were outsiders. It was planned. One or two looted the house, another drove livestock away, a third would set the place ablaze. There was a foundation and some walls when I returned, not much else.

Zinaida Ivanovna A., age fifty-six, lived with her family in Chermen where she worked more than twenty years at a small cafe. She reports that she was taken by Ingush militants and held for nine days in Nazran. Just prior to her captivity, she witnessed looting and the killing of an unarmed male Ossetian hostage held by Ingush militants. Zinaida, who was later exchanged, states that,

It started on a Saturday, October 31, 1992. They herded some Russian soldiers to our village. They had come on APCs, but the Ingush had detained them at the bridge and stripped them of their uniforms....The Ingush put on their uniforms and cordoned off the crossroads. It was our turn to take the kolkhoz's animals to pasture that morning, a relative came

to our house and said, 'Don't take the animals out. Something horrible is happening outside.' There were so many gathered there, in Kamaz trucks, in ambulances, in APCs. All armed.... There were some local Ingush and Ingush from Nazran.

On Sunday, November 1, they [Ingush] started to loot cars and machinery from the state farm. On Saturday they had already seized the state farm building and blocked it off. They also started to fire wildly on Sunday.... About forty of us were sheltered in the courtyard of a neighbor on Ostrovskaya street. We stood there and saw the Ingush firing at everything and burning houses. Around 11:00 A.M. on Sunday, the Ingush started to go house to house and take hostages. One of them came in the courtyard [where we were hiding], he was holding a grenade. Children started to cry. He shouted, 'If you don't be quiet, I'll blow you up.'

Then they started to take the men out. One of them, however, Arshak Kuliyeu, hid behind a door but they found him. They placed him against the door and began to fire, hitting his legs. He couldn't stand, he was on his knees, and he began to crawl behind the door. They started to drag him in another room, hitting him with their rifle [butts].... Then they fired into him. Then two guys dragged him out of the house, cut his eyes and slashed his body. Then they brought some water, washed their knives, and put them back in their pockets as if nothing had happened.

They said that they wouldn't harm the women and children after they took away the men. I went to see what was going on in the street, and an armed Ingush shouted at me, 'Come on, get out and come here quickly or I'll shoot everyone.' We walked out along the road, then they put us in cars and took us away....⁹⁹

Tamara S., age forty-seven, claims that she was also taken hostage on November 1, 1992. She and her family made an initial attempt to flee on October 31, but they turned back to their home after seeing that Ingush had blocked the road south leading towards Vladikavkaz. She lived in the middle of Chermen. Tamara explains that,

Those who were still left in the village gathered together. It had become impossible to leave. Everything was blocked off and we started to think of what to do. I had hid my children in our house. Then I noticed by our house a small truck had stopped, one armed fighter got out and shouted to his friends, "Get out, this house." He was pointing to my house. When I saw that I ran towards my house--my children were inside--and shouted: "Don't shoot." They swore at me. They weren't Ingush, but mercenaries, Chechens. I could tell by the way they spoke and later I asked one... They shouted at me, "Where is your son? Where is your husband?" I told them and they took my husband away in the small truck. An APC they took from the Russians came up; on it sat an Ingush electrician in the village, Mukharbek M. I screamed at him how he could be doing this. They then started to loot the home, ripping through things and taking what they wanted. After that another armed fighter threw two grenades in the house, but neither went off.

According to Tamara, all the Ossetian houses on Mayakovskii street were looted:

They opened drawers and wardrobes, pulled things out and tossed them about. They took clothes, a stereo, [and] a television. One put on my daughter's coat. I told him he should be ashamed, it was a women's coat, but he growled at me, "Don't you think I have a daughter?"

The next day, she was taken hostage along with her sister-in-law, Gabet S., and two of her neighbors, a husband and wife. They were reportedly taken to Nazran, where they were brought to the police station and registered. The men and women were separated. She was held with forty-six other people in her cell. After six days she was released, and traveled to Olginskoye, where she found her children. Her husband, she believes, was murdered by Ingush; his corpse was discovered on January 27, 1993. He had been shot in the back of the neck. Mrs. S. also alleges that Murzabek Tukayev, an old man, was killed after his wife was taken hostage because he was too old and immobile.

Tamerlan is a forty-six-year-old Ossetian who lived with his extended family in Chermen all his life. His home was totally destroyed as a result of the fighting, though no one from his family was killed or taken hostage. In late 1993 he managed to make partial repairs to his house to allow his family to occupy a part of it. He told Human Rights Watch that he is categorically against the return of any Ingush.¹⁰⁰

In August 1994, Vitalii Karayev was the head of the administration of the village of Chermen. During the fighting his home was reportedly destroyed and looted by Ingush fighters, and his father, brother, and mother were taken hostage. He reported that the same fighters murdered his neighbor, Ruslan Khavkazov.

My brother, mother, and father were taken hostage. A neighbor was murdered. This happened on October 31. When people started to flee, when the houses started to burn, everyone began to head in the direction of the neighboring village Olginskoye. My family and neighbor were stopped by Ingush on the road towards Olginskoye. They hit my father, Sergei, age sixty-two, in the head, and he lost consciousness. They slashed my brother, Anatolii, age thirty-eight, with a knife, and shot and killed our neighbor, Ruslan Khavkazov, also thirty-eight. They took them away in our own car, which they then stole.... They were returned on November 8, 1992. There was a list of hostages held there and I found them on it. My house was completely looted. Only an old couch was left. The roof of my house remained, but nothing was left inside. They broke all the windows, but luckily it wasn't torched.¹⁰¹

Karayev also reported that the Ossetians in the village still suffer Ingush violence. On August 13, 1994, he alleged that Ingush militants tried to take hostage Aslamov Khariton, a sixty-year-old man who was working in the fields on a tractor. He explains that, "Four men on horses speaking in Ingush rode up to him and tried to grab him. But people ran over and scared them away."

Violations by Ossetian Forces

About half of the 738 Ingush homes in Chermen were completely destroyed as a result of the conflict. Another sixty-five houses were partially destroyed. An Ingush man with whom Human Rights Watch spoke evacuated his family on November 3, 1992. When he left his home at the end of that day it was still standing and in good order. On November 5, 1992, he bribed a Russian soldier to let him through a checkpoint. He explains that, "My home was still burning. We had just pulled up to the house when someone started to shoot at us. We hurried back in the car and drove away."¹⁰²

In the period after November 5, 1992, to the present, the unofficial Ingush representative in the village, Ayub Matsiyev, alleges that thirteen Ingush were murdered in or around Chermen by Ossetian paramilitaries, militants, or security forces.¹⁰³ Human Rights Watch was not able to confirm independently all of these allegations. He reports that his own nephew, Bashir Khamidovich Matsiyev, was killed in Chermen at the crossroads on January 20, 1993, and that an additional twelve individuals were killed during this period, including the following:¹⁰⁴

| Mr. Galakhov, January 1993.

| Four members of the Ivloyev family, allegedly murdered by Ossetian militiamen in February 1993. They went to the village after the Temporary Administration allowed Ingush back in. They were reportedly detained by Ossetian paramilitaries near the village cafe. Their bodies were found later.

| Kurkiyev A.L. and Khaukhayev V.D., in April 1993. They went to cut hay near the border with Ossetia and were allegedly detained by Ossetian paramilitaries and taken away. Their corpses were later discovered.

| The Artskhanov brothers, in June 1993. They came back to the village to look at their house and were murdered.

| Gorikov, Alikhan and Mirzoyev, S.I., in July 1993.

| Sharsudin Yangiyev, in September 1993.

| Mutaliyev, N.I., in December 1993.

Human Rights Watch spoke with the relatives of the Artskhanov brothers, who were allegedly murdered in Chermen on June 18, 1993. The men had gone back to look over the house they had abandoned and were killed by local Ossetians.¹⁰⁵ Their house was not in the Ingush part of the village, but in the Ossetian. A relative lamented that,

Around 4:30 P.M. [on June 18, 1993], they set out to check their home [in Chermen]. Probably they were followed and quickly captured....They left on the 18th [of June], and the next day they were already in the morgue. They both were killed quickly [after they arrived in Chermen]. If you could have seen what state they were in. No person could withstand it....They took their car and cut both their throats.

KARTSA

Violations by Ossetian Forces

Kartsa, a suburb of Vladikavkaz, lies to the northwest of the city, just down the road from the Russian military base *Sputnik*. On October 24, 1992, Ingush militants set up posts around the village; by October 31, 1992, the village, in which Ingush fighters still held positions, was subjected to indiscriminate fire from rifles, machine guns, and grenade launchers by Ossetian security forces and paramilitaries. Many residents fled during the initial fighting to *Sputnik*, sometimes helped there by Russian troops. Other Ingush civilians were killed in crossfire, and at least seven Ossetians who had been taken hostage by Ingush militants were murdered. While most of Kartsa's pre-conflict population of 10-12,000 people were Ingush, currently only about 1,500 remain.¹⁰⁶ Another three hundred or so members of other nationalities, including a handful of Ossetians, also live there.¹⁰⁷ Of the roughly one thousand homes in Kartsa—handsome one- and two-story brick and stone dwellings with fancy tin roofs—one-quarter were wantonly destroyed by Ossetian militiamen, many believed to be from South Ossetia. Many homes were also looted. Other homes were spared destruction because Russian troops quickly set up posts in the village. A favorite method of destruction was to turn on the cooking gas and then spray the home with small-arms fire.

At present, the Ingush in the village are isolated and must apply to the Russian authorities several days in advance to leave the village with an escort. In the past Ossetians have interfered with these convoys, including one hostage-taking incident in 1994 that is dealt with in this report. The need to travel to Nazran is extremely inconvenient for the villagers, especially for medical emergencies. The Ingush in Kartsa must travel to Nazran, about thirty minutes by car, for medical care rather than visit the hospital in Vladikavkaz, five minutes away.

Zakrei Magomedovich Musiyev, an Ingush, still lives in the settlement of Kartsa. He works as an adviser for community relations to the former Temporary Administration and serves as the chairman of the social council of the residents of Kartsa.

Mr. Musiyev lived through the attacks of November 1992, returning to the village after about two weeks. He has lived there ever since. He reported to Human Rights Watch that sixty individuals, mostly civilians, were killed by Ossetian militiamen from October 31 to November 4. Of these, two were Russians and one was Georgian; the rest were Ingush. He alleged that no one from the village participated in the fighting, though it seems clear that armed Ingush fighters were in the settlement. The overwhelming majority of this destruction occurred after the fighting had ended and people

had left the village. According to Mr. Musiyev, most people were killed as they fled:

Ossetian forces surrounded the village. For three days it was like being in a sack. From October 31 to November 3 there was heavy firing from all types of weapons. From the evening of November 3 people started to leave the village....Some went through the fields towards Dachnoye, and some who couldn't go that way-there was heavy fire from Vladikavkaz and Dachnoye...went to [Sputnik], the military base.¹⁰⁸....Most of these people were killed in the village as they fled to the military base, going from house to house and from street to street. When the APCs came, all the noise, so many vehicles, you can't imagine. You had to hide. Whoever came upon them head-on was shot at point-blank range. There were corpses lying about the streets....Most of the people were killed on the fourth of November.

About four thousand of Kartsa's inhabitants made it to the nearby military base *Sputnik*, where they resided about two weeks. Every day convoys of *Ikarus* buses evacuated Ingush to Kartsa, but some people refused to go and returned to their village at the end of November.

Lida, age thirty-five, lived in Kartsa until the fighting forced her out of her home, which was then wantonly destroyed by Ossetian militiamen. She now lives in a school converted into a refugee center in neighboring Ingushetiya.¹⁰⁹ On the evening of October 30, 1992, Lida reported hearing firing, but thought it was a military exercise; when she woke up the next morning, however, her neighbor told her, "A war has begun." She explains that,

We all sat in the cellar of a neighbor, several families, men, women, and children. We sat there until Monday, but when things would quiet down we would return to our home for a bit and eat. On Monday our elders decided that we should send the children to the Russian military base nearby, and the military came for the kids. The next day the APCs came. They were Ossetians, they were speaking in Ossetian. They stopped by the house and shot at it. We thought they would come in and find us, but they did not. The house started to burn, but the Ossetians left and some of the young men went upstairs to put the fire out.

The remaining people in the cellar wanted to make their way to Nazran, the capital of Ingushetiya, by heading east through the fields, but they heard that Ossetian forces were blocking the way. The following night, Russian forces from the Sputnik military base evacuated them. They spent roughly ten days there, and then were taken in a column of buses to Nazran.

Another Ingush women still vividly remembers the events of 1992 when she and her neighbors were trapped in "a ring of fire." She fled her home with her family on November 2 to the army base at Sputnik, and returned after several weeks to find her house burned to the ground and most of her possessions looted. According to her,

The firing started on the 30th of October. From Oktyabr'skoye.¹¹⁰ Then they started to fire from the children's home across the street. We were in a ring of fire....we ran away in the clothes we had on, that's it. They took or destroyed everything.¹¹¹

Since then, the woman has received one small payment from the Russian government and infrequent International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) packages as compensation.

All nationalities suffered in Kartsa in November 1992. Grisha, a sixty-five-year-old Georgian, worked in a store in Vladikavkaz and lived in Kartsa. He left his home on November 2, 1992, because of heavy machine gun and rocket firehe claims came from local North Ossetian OMON troops. According to Grisha, "I didn't see any Ingush fighters. The firing was heavy, and I made my escape out the back through the garden. I left everything, and they destroyed it all."¹¹² He says he received 29,000 rubles in compensation from the Russian government in 1992, and nothing from it since, though the ICRC has helped out with food.¹¹³

Violence against the Ingush population of Kartsa by Ossetian paramilitaries continues to this day, including the taking of six hostages on May 19, 1994.¹¹⁴ The incident occurred at 1:30 P.M. on the Chermen road as the six individuals were on their way to Nazran under the escort of an officer of the former Temporary Administration, Lt. Col. Yu. P. Gorev.¹¹⁵ Four passenger cars filled with automatic riflemen blocked the car, then escorted it to the headquarters of the UOONKH in the Lenin district.¹¹⁶ When Lt. Colonel Gorev went upstairs to talk to the commander, the car with its occupants was whisked away, and the car was later found abandoned. The procurator of the Lenin district of Vladikavkaz opened a criminal investigation according to Article 126, part II of the Russian Criminal code, and two suspects were identified, though they went into hiding. On May 25, 1994, the commandant of Kartsa received a note from the alleged hostage-takers offering to exchange them for three Ossetian hostages-including a North Ossetian Militia Colonel-taken on March 30, 1994.¹¹⁷ On May 26, 1994, a suspect in the crime, a member of the Lenin District UOONKH, was murdered.

Abdurashid, a middle-aged chauffeur, lived in Kartsa most of his life. He had a residency permit, and reported that his relations with his non-Ingush neighbors, such as Armenians and Ossetians, were fine. Abdurashid's handsome two-story home was totally looted in November 1992, and in early August 1994, an explosive device, probably dynamite, was thrown against the side of his house, blowing out all the windows on one side. He stays mostly in the confines of Kartsa, afraid to venture into Vladikavkaz, a few kilometers away. According to Abdurashid,

I left for ten days after all the fighting started [in 1992]. It all began with the law to rehabilitate [repressed people] of 1991. A Russian commander, Savvin, came here in November. After he left the BTR's came through shooting, and I left with my family. On the next street over a man, Alaotdin Khadjiev was killed, and another guy, Maksharib, is still missing. When I returned most everything had been taken, and they burned the inside of my house. The few animals we kept were dead in the courtyard.¹¹⁸

He came back after ten days and slowly tried to rebuild his home, but in early August 1994 unidentified attackers bombed it: "They threw dynamite at my house--there was an explosion, but no fragments. Until the end of 1993, there used to be posts of Russian troops [Interior Ministry] in the village, but then they took them away. Investigators from the Temporary Administration came, took statements, looked over the damage, and made their report."

Violations by Ingush Forces

The Russian human rights group *Memorial* reported that seven Ossetian hostages were killed by Ingush fighters in Kartsa at a club during the fighting.¹¹⁹

KURTAT

Kurtat, a largely Ingush village of some four hundred homes, lies about six kilometers northeast of Vladikavkaz, south of Chermen.¹²⁰ From its eastern edge, it is about eight kilometers from the Ingush border. Fighting erupted there during the conflict, and both sides took hostages and killed civilians during the "hot" stage of the unrest. But the Ingush eventually were overwhelmed by the numerically-superior, better-armed, and better-organized Ossetian forces. Consequently, all Ingush were expelled from the village, and their homes looted, burned, and often destroyed. Of the 302 Ingush homes, 290 were completely destroyed; of the 102 Ossetian homes, ten were fully destroyed and two partially. No Ingush remain in Kurtat, and the Muslim cemetery, while unharmed, sits untended, choked by weeds and high grass.

Violations by Ossetian Forces

Ahmet, thirty-four, was a native of Kurtat before he was forced out of the village by advancing Ossetian forces in early

November 1992.¹²¹ His aunt and uncle were taken hostage and the latter was killed. His body was discovered in early 1993. Ahmet's home was looted and burned.

According to Ahmet, the fighting started on the morning of October 31, when firing from the southwest, from Dachnoye, woke him at 1:00 A.M. Previously, Ossetian Interior Ministry APCs stood outside the village, ostensibly to protect it, but now these same APCs started to fire into the village. Ahmet described the public perception of events at the time to Human Rights Watch:

On the second day we began to evacuate the women and the elderly, those who didn't refuse to leave. The first couple of days or so people hoped that they would be helped because it was announced that Russian peacekeeping troops were being dispatched to the conflict zone. I too thought that Russia would stand between the Ingush and the Ossetians and that the situation would return to normal. But people deceived themselves on this. Many of the elderly didn't leave, thinking that soon the troops would come and save them.

But as time went on, the situation grew worse. The village began to be shelled, and houses started to burn. The Ossetians committed their APCs to the battle, and the Ingush fired back with light weapons. Shrapnel from the firing endangered the evacuation, and hit cars and trucks packed with Ingush heading out of the village. Ahmet made several trips with his car along the Chermen road, which came increasingly under fire as the conflict continued. He left Kurtat for the last time on November 4, 1992, when he fled northeast through the field toward the Ingush border.

Many of those unable or unwilling to leave were allegedly killed or taken hostage when Ossetian forces took the village, and Ahmet reports that his aunt and uncle, Huseyin and Malikat Dzharakov, were killed. Huseyin was sixty, Malikat seventy-four years old. Ahmet explains that,

They didn't leave, but stayed. They had hope....This old woman worked her whole life and just didn't know what could happen. She is still missing, but we buried him [Huseyin] in February 1993. We were brought nine corpses in that month. I immediately recognized him. Every corpse had one ear cut off.

One of Ahmet's neighbors was among the nine corpses, Makkharip Gorbakov, age sixty-five. Ahmet reported that many of the corpses had been mutilated.

Khaziza I., age thirty, lived in the village of Kurtat until forced out during the fighting. In the unrest she reports losing her father, Uvais, age sixty-seven, and her uncle, Magomet. They all lived in the village of Oktyabr'skoye. She explained the events of that fall as follows:

The situation was very tense the last few days before hostilities broke out. Everything started on the night of October 31. We fled the village on November 5. Houses were burning from the fire and Russian APCs had already started to enter the village. My own house was burned, and we fled to any house where it was safer. Finally, we were taken away by bus, but many had to flee over the fields. There is nothing left from [the Ingush section of] the village. And our neighbors took all the belongings of our house.

My whole family was taken hostage-mother, father-on October 30 or 31, and held for nine days. Then they released everyone, but for some reason my father was taken away. He was the Mullah. My mother saw him being taken away. No one has heard of him since. My uncle stayed when his family had left and was taken hostage. He hasn't been heard from since.¹²²

Violations by Ingush Forces

Ossetians also suffered in Kurtat as a result of the fighting. Although only about ten of the Ossetian homes were destroyed (out of approximately ninety in all), reportedly at least one Ossetian family was robbed and harrassed and one of the family members was allegedly murdered, in contradiction to a statement made by an Ingush from Kurtat who was interviewed by Human Rights Watch:

Although there were one hundred Ossetian households, the Ingush didn't touch one ethnic Ossetian. Moreover, women were not touched. Of course, there were those eager to [harm women].¹²³

A retired Ossetian woman lived in Kurtat with her extended family. During the October-November 1992 events she alleges that her house was looted, and her husband, who stayed behind when Ossetian militia men evacuated her and others, was abducted and murdered. She told Human Rights Watch that the phone lines to her house were cut on October 29, and a day later she and her neighbor, who was driving her to work, were stopped at a roadblock manned by armed Ingush, one of whom she recognized as a neighbor. The Ingush there threatened them with rifles and forced the man to move some concrete blocks. According to her, shooting started on the morning of October 31, at around 2:00 A.M. The next morning she witnessed buses bringing in armed fighters and leaving with Ingush women and children. These armed Ingush fighters were reportedly not locals, but that day other Ingush fighters, local young men according to her, came to her home, stole two family cars, clothes, and jewelry on the pretext of searching for weapons. She related that,

That day, a group of young Ingush, high-school students, the oldest was maybe twenty-three, came to our house. They immediately went to our car....He said they were going to trade the car for automatic rifles in Grozny. That day still others came, turned the house upside down, searching for weapons. They took anything they wanted. Suits, women's clothing, gold. They tied everything in a sheet put it in the car [and left]. Later others came and took our other car.¹²⁴

The woman believed her situation and that of her family was hopeless when late on October 31, 1992, two armed Ingush, people she recognized as her neighbors, came and announced: "Get ready, we're going to take you to Nazran, you'll be okay there."

On the morning of November 1, 1992, before sunrise, Ossetian forces on APCs from the direction of Sunzha in the southeast managed to break through to the woman's home.¹²⁵ With the Ossetian APCs providing cover, she and her family-but not her sixty-eight-year-old husband-ran through the fields. "We went by foot through the fields, it was raining, the fields had been plowed, everyone was falling." She believes that her husband was taken by Ingush fighters and killed. His body was found one month later. The woman told Human Rights Watch that, "They tortured him as they wanted...we only identified him through his clothes."

VLADIKAVKAZ

Violations by Ossetian Forces

Approximately 17,000 Ingush resided in Vladikavkaz, the North Ossetian capital, and its surrounding areas. Today practically none remain. Of the 171 homes destroyed in Vladikavkaz, 166 belonged to Ingush. In addition, 800 apartments owned by Ingush were seized and their inhabitants forced out.

Mrs. S., thirty-seven years old, lived in Vladikavkaz on Vladikavkaz street in a family dormitory with her husband and nine children, who ranged in age from one to eighteen. She reports that she and her children were taken hostage at 1:00 A.M. on Saturday, October 31, 1992, by North Ossetian OMON forces. She and her family members were taken to Mairamadag, a village west of Vladikavkaz, and held in a basement until exchanged two weeks later. She states that,

Friday, October 30, was quiet, but on Saturday morning, October 31, I turned on the TV, and the news announced that a war had started. That was in the morning. After lunch, some men dressed in civilian clothes came to the apartment and said, "Go wherever you want, but get out of here." I had never seen these people before.¹²⁶

She called her parents in Kartsa, who told her to stay put because women and children would not be harmed. She took their advice, but later that day North Ossetian OMON troops returned, this time violently. Mrs. S. explains that,

At about 1:00 A.M. Sunday morning, there was banging on the door. I went up to it, heard male voices, and became frightened and didn't open the door. I stood, my legs shaking, the banging continued, it was horrible. Finally, they bashed the door in and shouted, "What is your nationality." I figured if I said, "Ingush," they would kill me, so I remained quiet. This angered one of them, who fired a pistol. I fell to the floor, wounded.

Carried in a blanket, Mrs. S. and the children were herded off to a waiting bus and then taken to Mairamadag, where they were held in a basement for two weeks. During that time, according to Mrs. S., both men and women were taken away and beaten and humiliated. She told Human Rights Watch that, "They would take people in the evening and then return them towards morning in such a condition." Finally, Mrs. S. and her children were exchanged and sent to Nazran, where she underwent an operation for her wound.

ZAVODSKII (A SUBURB OF VLADIKAVKAZ)

Violations by Ossetians Forces

Kuresh, age sixty-two, lived in Zavodskii, a mostly Ossetian settlement a few kilometers north of Vladikavkaz. Born in the Prigorodnyi region, he was deported with his family in 1944 to Kazakhstan, returning fifteen years later. On October 31, 1992, on his way to a funeral in Kartsa, he reports that he was taken hostage after boarding a bus near the "Druzhba" movie theater in Vladikavkaz and held nine days before being exchanged. He explains that,

I got on the number 12 bus at about 3:00 P.M. at the "Druzhba Theater." Then some North Ossetian OMON stopped the bus before we got to the corn market and told me to get on another bus. They didn't hurt me, just asked for my papers, which I didn't have with me. They put me in a cellar that was full of people.¹²⁷

Kuresh was then taken to grain storage facility outside of the village of Gizel, about five kilometers west of Vladikavkaz. "This place was packed. Every minute they brought someone. They even had two Ossetians and a Russian, but they were quickly released."

The next day, he was taken by truck with other hostages to Mairamadag, where three of his family members-also detained by Ossetian forces-joined him. They were held in a basement near a pigsty. Part of the time he was treated well and given food, while part of the time he was not fed. On November 9, 1992, he and his family members were exchanged along with three other busloads of Ingush for Ossetian hostages.

What happened to Kuresh's wife Maryam and his youngest son Murat underscores the largely negative role refugees from South Ossetia played in the conflict. While a North Ossetian neighbor hid them and tried to help them, South Ossetian refugees looted the home and a policeman originally from South Ossetia reportedly torched the remains. Maryam told Human Rights Watch that,

Two of our neighbors, both Ossetians, hid us. When they took the rest of our men away, our neighbors told Valeri Tsikoyev, the local militiaman to leave me and my daughter-in-law alone, and we remained at home with our youngest

child, Murat. Then they hid us for six days.¹²⁸

Maryam, however, did not want to abandon her home, and on the evening of November 5, 1992, she, her daughter-in-law, and son returned home. Later that night she reports that they were taken hostage by a militiaman and fifteen other men, who then proceeded to loot and burn the house. Maryam explained:

That militiaman, who is originally from South Ossetia, came with fifteen men to take us away. Were we that powerful, two women and a boy, that they needed fifteen men? They didn't let us take anything. These southerners, how many times I gave them things, they were refugees from South Ossetia. They looted all our things. Then the militiaman burned our house down.

Maryam and her son were taken to a medical institute in Vladikavkaz near the movie theater "Druzhba," but her daughter-in-law, who was half-Ossetian and half-Russian, returned to her father's family. The next day Maryam, her son, and thirty-four other Ingush hostages were exchanged for sixteen Ossetian hostages.

TARSKOYE

Violations By Ossetian Forces

Tarskoye, a majority Ossetian village (284 Ingush homes; 529 Ossetian) is located in a valley at the foothills of the Caucasian mountains approximately ten kilometers southeast of Vladikavkaz. Even by the admission of Ossetians with whom we spoke, there was no fighting in the village during the conflict. Despite the lack of fighting, 190 of the Ingush homes were fully destroyed and sixty-one partially damaged. One Ossetian woman in the village told us, "Luckily, all the Ossetian homes were undamaged...I don't know [about the destroyed Ingush homes], maybe they themselves wrecked them. They blame us for everything."¹²⁹ An Ossetian militiaman in the village told us that the Ingush had not fought and that all the houses had been destroyed wantonly by the Ossetians as an act of anger.¹³⁰

Ossetian forces also reportedly took hostages and committed murder. Troops from a nearby Russian military base helped to evacuate civilians, but did little to stop the destruction of homes or other violations of humanitarian law.

An elderly Ingush man, Magomet K., had taken refuge at the Russian base, but on November 5, 1992, he returned to his home, already ransacked by Ossetian forces. Shortly thereafter he reports that he was taken hostage by Ossetian paramilitaries. Magomet alleges that three other Ingush hostages who were with him were later found murdered. He recounts that,

We entered Tarskoye after everyone had left, we were hiding at the Russian base. It must have been November 5 or something. We went to our home, everything was broken and destroyed. When we went out on the street again, an APC from the direction of Yuzhnyi came and stopped us in the street. They asked why we were here and I pointed to my house, but they only said, "Come to our headquarters." There were eight people there. We left there and the Ossetians went into another house and arrested Muzkhmadbashi Temirkhanov, and a woman named Tamara, age 22, and Sultan B. I was put in one car, the other three in another vehicle. We didn't see them again, I think they shot them by the road. I was held for ten days in Vladikavkaz, in a stable....Finally they exchanged fifty of us for fifty Ossetians, but when they did the exchange they took away some young people who didn't come back.¹³¹

Human Rights Watch spoke with the wife of Sultan B. She asserts that they stayed in Tarskoye until November 4th, 1992, and then escaped through the mountains to Ingushetiya with the whole family. Her mother-in-law was ill and could not continue on, so her husband took her back to the village. A brother-in-law accompanied the two. That was the last day she saw her husband alive. Parts of his body were discovered six months later. According to her,

On the fifth day it was impossible to stay in the village, so we went into the woods to spend the night...But to get to safety we had to go through the mountains, and many couldn't make it. So I continued with our children and my father-in-law and my husband, Sultan B., returned to the village with his mother, who was quite ill. My brother in-law also returned. They were all taken hostage, but my husband was taken away and killed. They found his remains [and those of two others killed] six months later. They brought little bits of bones. Dogs, wild hogs had eaten the corpses.

OTHER VIOLATIONS IN 1994

Killings and hostage-taking continued sporadically in 1994. April and May were extremely tense months in the state of emergency region:

| On March 30, three Ossetians were taken hostage (Tebiyev, Khamitsayev, and Byazrov);

| On April 7, in Ingushetiya, Ozdoyev was killed and his two friends Aspiyev and Gagiyeu were taken hostage;

| On April 12, a column of Ingush headed to Kartsa from Nazran was stopped outside their destination and taken hostage, though they were later freed;

| On May 19, six Ingush, citizens of North Ossetia, were taken hostage on their way to Kartsa. As of this writing, they are still missing;

| In May, eight Georgian road builders were killed working in Ingushetiya at the Assinovskii gorge on the Alkun-Targim road;^{[132](#)}

| On Sunday, June 12, 1994, two soldiers from the former Temporary Administration, serving in the Special Investigative Group (OSOG) of the MVD, were shot and killed in Malgobek, a town in Ingushetiya. Major Vadim Ivanovich Moiseyev and Sergeant Danil' Khikmatullovich Baidashev were shot seven times. Both men were unarmed.^{[133](#)}

OFFICIAL RUSSIAN CASUALTY FIGURES^{[134](#)}

Total dead as of June 31, 1994: 644

Those killed through November 4, 1992:

Ossetian: 151

Ingush: 302

Other Nationalities: 25

North Ossetian Ministry of the Interior: 9

Russian Ministry of Defense: 8

Russian Ministry of the Interior, Internal Troops: 3

Those killed between November 5, 1992 and December 31, 1992:

Ossetian: 9

Ingush: 3

Other Nationalities: 2

Unknown Nationalities: 12

Unified Investigative Group, Ministry of the Interior: 1

Those killed in 1993:

Ossetian: 40

Ingush: 33

Other Nationalities: 21

Unknown Nationalities: 30

North Ossetian Ministry of the Interior: 9

Ingush Ministry of the Interior: 5

Russian Ministry of Defense: 3

Russian Ministry of the Interior, Internal Troops: 4

Unified Investigative Group, Russian Ministry of the Interior: 8

Those killed as of June 31, 1994:

Ossetian: 6

Ingush: 3

Other Nationalities: 7

Russian Ministry of Defense: 1

Russian Ministry of the Interior, Internal Troops: 2

Unified Investigative Group, Russian Ministry of the Interior: 4

VI. RUSSIAN POLICY AND CONDUCT

THE TEMPORARY ADMINISTRATION

The Russian Federal government has ultimate responsibility for the conduct of all state forces, including Russian Defense Ministry and Interior Ministry, North Ossetian Interior Ministry, and Ingush Interior Ministry troops, that operate in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia or in contiguous territories. On November 2, 1992, the Russian government instituted a state of emergency in the Prigorodnyi region and certain areas of North Ossetia and Ingushetiya. The emergency rule decree, which the Russian legislature renewed every two months, remained in force until February 1, 1995. The so-called "Temporary Administration" set up in accord with this decree had complete executive power over the territory covered by the emergency rule decree, including over Ingush and North Ossetian authorities as well as over Russian federal forces. It constituted the state body on the ground responsible for upholding the law and protecting human rights. The head of the Temporary Administration was directly subordinate to the President Boris Yeltsin. The Russian Defense and Interior Ministry forces and the Federal Counter-intelligence Service (FSK) were all operationally subordinated to the head of the Temporary Administration in the area under emergency rule. Article 5 of the emergency rule decree also ordered that, "measures be taken to prevent armed conflict between the opposing sides and for the defense and safety of citizens and for the rigorous enforcement of the emergency rule regime." [135](#)

On November 4, 1992, after a request by the North Ossetian president, a new presidential decree was issued whereby organs of state power and local selfrule bodies were allowed to continue to operate in the region.[136](#) While this new decree created a situation of dual power whereby local authorities would have to obey both their own government edicts and those of the Temporary Administration, it did not diminish the ultimate responsibility of the Russian Federal government through the Temporary Administration for actions of local North Ossetian and Ingush security forces.

In reality, however, the Temporary Administration made little use of any of its authority, hampered by the dual power situation. Demonstrations by both sides were often held. Groups of angry Ossetians gathered to block physically the return of displaced Ingush to their homes. Little was achieved in disarming the population. Radical groups printed and distributed inflammatory literature. On August 1, 1993, gunmen, believed to be Ingush, assassinated the head of the Temporary Administration, Viktor Polyanichko as well as two other officials.[137](#) Aleksandr Kotenkov, the third head of the Temporary Administration, maintained that elections were illegal under the emergency rule decree but admitted that he had little power to prevent a presidential election in Ingushetiya. He complained that, "By law, elections, demonstrations and meetings are not allowed in the emergency rule zone. But on the other hand, how can I prevent this? Use force? Absurd. Even if we would block off the building where the people meet they would find another place."[138](#)

On February 7, 1995, the Council of the Federation, the upper house of the Russian parliament, failed to renew the decree in spite of government approval of the measure, and the state of emergency was revoked.[139](#) In its place the Russian government under Presidential Decree #139 created a Temporary State Committee ("Vremennyy Gosudarstvennii Komitet") on the basis of the Temporary Administration.

While the new Temporary State Committee is considered the legal successor of the Temporary Administration, it has diminished powers and is not the overall executive power in the area as was its predecessor.[140](#) However, the Russian Federal government still has ultimate responsibility for the actions of all state actors in the region.

CULPABILITY OF THE RUSSIAN GOVERNMENT

Determining those responsible for the outbreak of hostilities would require a large-scale investigation and access to classified Russian and Ossetian government documents-both of which are beyond the scope of this report. However, it seems clear from available evidence that once fighting broke out, the Russian government failed in its obligations to

protect human life and property in the Prigorodnyi region of North Ossetia in spite of public claims that it had control over the situation.

From the first day of the conflict, high-level Russian security personnel and other government officials were on the ground in both North Ossetia and Ingushetiya. Within a week of the conflict, Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev toured the scene of fighting. In spite of this intense and direct involvement, serious mistakes were made. Russian officials disbursed large numbers of weapons to North Ossetian authorities, who then handed them out to both North Ossetian security officers and to paramilitary groups and militias. Russian forces did not separate opposing Ingush fighters and North Ossetian security forces and paramilitaries, thus allowing the civilian population to remain where they were. Such an intervention, conducted early in the conflict, might have prevented the forced migration of the vast majority of Ingush living in the Prigorodnyi region. Rather, Russian forces either aided in the evacuation of Ingush civilians-"polite" forced evacuation-or spearheaded attacks against villages held by Ingush militants, forcing out both civilians and fighters. While in some cases such evacuations saved lives, the end result was the same: eviction of the Ingush population. Russian forces either could not or refused to stop the wanton destruction and looting of Ingush homes and property, which continued long after the "hot" stage of the conflict ended on November 5. Although Russian forces had ostensibly established some control over the Prigorodnyi region under an emergency rule decree, they allowed North Ossetian paramilitaries and others to loot systematically and destroy large numbers of Ingush homes and property. Indeed, most Ingush dwellings were destroyed after November 5, 1992.

From the first day of the conflict, high-level Russian government officials were on the scene of fighting and stated that the situation was under control. On October 31, 1992, a high-level Russian delegation arrived in Vladikavkaz including Deputy Prime Minister Georgii Khizha, Chairman of the State Committee for Emergency Situations S.K. Shoigu and his assistant Col. General Filatov, and the commander of Russian Interior Ministry Internal Troops Col. General Savvin. They approved the disbursement of hundreds of light weapons to Ossetian MVD troops, which also found their way into the hands of Ossetian paramilitaries. On November 1, 1992, Itar-Tass reported that two regiments of Russian paratroopers were sent to the conflict region to support MVD troops.¹⁴¹ On November 2, a state of emergency was declared in the paramilitary Prigorodnyi region, and Deputy Prime Minister Khizha was named head of the "Temporary Administration," charged with the task of ending the conflict. In a telephone interview with the Moscow daily *Izvestiya*, on the evening of November 3, 1992, Khizha stated that he had at his disposal sufficient forces to separate the fighters, and that a majority of the villages were under his control, thanks to the decisive action by Russian paratroopers, MVD units, and Ossetian paramilitaries.¹⁴²

During talks held on November 4, 1992, between Khizha and Issa Kostoyev, President Yeltsin's representative in Ingushetiya, a cease-fire was announced and supposed to take effect at 8:00 P.M. that day. The cease-fire envisioned Russian military occupation of all villages in the Prigorodnyi region, disbanding of all armed bands, free passage for refugees, and exchange of prisoners and hostages. According to reports from the scene, by 6:00 P.M., November 4, 1992, Kurtat and Dachnoye were taken back by OMON, republican guard, and paramilitaries of North Ossetia. At that time all populated areas previously held by Ingush fighters were under the control of Russian forces, MVD troops of North Ossetia, North Ossetia Republican guards, or militia forces.¹⁴³ By this time almost all Ingush resistance had been broken, though isolated shots were heard throughout the area.

Within a week after fighting broke out, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev personally became involved in managing the crisis. On November 5, 1992, Grachev-accompanied by Security Minister Victor Barannikov-flew to Vladikavkaz to oversee Russian military operations. Grachev gave the first hint that official statements were inaccurate:

I came here with the Ministers of Security and the Interior of the Russian Federation with a clear goal. First, *to ascertain for myself what the situation is, since reports from different sources are, to say the least, not the same and at times contradict each other*; second, to look into the activities of Russian units, including those of Internal Ministry

troops: what tasks they have been given, how are they carrying them out, what are the results....finally,...to jointly pass a resolution dealing with the cordoning off and disarming of nationalist bands of both sides."¹⁴⁴

Resignations and reassignments in ministries involved in stabilizing the Prigorodnyi conflict were the first indications of a botched operation. Georgii Khizha barely served one week as head of the former Temporary Administration when he was replaced by Sergei Shakhrai on November 9, 1992. Four days earlier Shakhrai was appointed the head of the State Committee on Nationalities(*Goskonnats*) with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister.¹⁴⁵ In mid-November 1992, Lieutenant General Vasilii Savvin, the commander of Internal Forces of the Russian MVD, resigned without official explanation shortly after returning from North Ossetia.¹⁴⁶

Some early press reports alleged problems because of the supposed Russian forces' pro-Ossetian stance. One paper reported how Yuri N., a lieutenant in the Russian military, deserted rather than fight against the civilian population. He explained that,

I decided it was better to desert than to take part in this. What I saw was horrible. Armed Ossetian units followed right behind us into these villages, annihilating and robbing the peaceful inhabitants, the Ingush. We did not have the right to intervene-no orders. In my opinion a regiment of Russian troops sent into the region was intentionally held up at the airport in Vladikavkaz so that the Ossetians could operate without any hindrance. I know that several of my fellow officers also intend to desert so as not to besmirch themselves for the rest of their lives.¹⁴⁷

Others also accused Russian forces of failing to prevent civilian deaths and destruction. In late November 1992, only three weeks after the height of the fighting, a group of leading liberals such as Yelena Bonner and Yuri Afanas'yev published a letter criticizing Georgii Khizha, and his deputy, General Filatov. They wrote:

President Yeltsin's decree instituting a state of emergency in the two republics [Ingushetiya and North Ossetia] was necessary. But at the beginning it was the conduct of those who had been ordered to carry out the decree, i.e. above all Deputy Prime Minister Khizha as well as General Filatov and others, that led to even more tragic consequences. These people flouted the president's decree and must answer for it in the most serious of terms.¹⁴⁸

An unpublished official report prepared by the Unified Investigative-Operational Group of the Procuracy of the Russian Federation, the Russian Ministry of Security, and the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs harshly criticized the inaction of security forces, their failure to prevent harm to civilians, and their pro-Ossetian conduct.¹⁴⁹ The document, "A Political Evaluation [Draft] by the Security Council of the Russian Federation on the circumstances of the armed conflict on the territory of the North Ossetian SSR and the Ingush Republic in October-November 1992," states that,

In the first few days of halting the conflict internal troops of the Ministry of the Interior were idle (*bezdeistvoval*), which armed formations from North Ossetia and units of volunteers from South Ossetia used to "free" the settlements of Kartsa and the villages of Terk and Chernorechenskoye....According to the conclusion of the [leadership] of the Unified Investigative-Operational Group of the Procuracy of the Russian Federation, the Ministry of Security, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in the first days of the conflict, the character and the means of bringing into action emergency rule did not fulfill the goals and tasks for which it was introduced. In the emergency rule region armed groups, including those from South Ossetia, continued to operate. Unified forces from the Ministry of the Interior and the Defense Ministry did not separate the hostile sides, did not liquidate or localize armed formations, did not disarm them....The prompt introduction of forces could have prevented such a number of casualties among the civilian population. In a number of cases with the direct connivance of armed forces of the Russian Ministry of the Interior and the North Ossetian Interior Ministry armed formations of the hostile sides committed violence against civilians, robbed, looted, torched and blew up houses, illegally settled in houses abandoned by their inhabitants.¹⁵⁰

The village of Kartsa, a suburb of Vladikavkaz, presents a clear example of how Russian forces helped evacuate Ingush but then did little to prevent Ossetian paramilitaries from wantonly destroying civilian homes and looting. In Chermen and other villages, Russian forces spearheaded attacks on villages held by Ingush militants, but then allowed North Ossetian security forces and paramilitaries to enter and wreak havoc. One Ingush displaced from Chermen declared to Human Rights Watch that, "The Russians went forward, and after them the Ossetians."[151](#)

Zekram Musiyev, a local community leader of about one thousand Ingush who returned to Kartsa, complained about the duality of Russian policy. While the military commander at *Sputnik* helped people escape and gave them refuge, Russian forces seemed to do little to prevent wide-scale looting and destruction of Kartsa by Ossetian forces once the fighting was over. According to Mr. Musiyev,

His name was Boshko, the commander of the division [at Sputnik]. He was then a colonel